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TC433
1986

"QUESTION OF EAST TIMOR"

STATEMENT BY

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I thank you Mr.Chairman, for allowing me to address the Special Committee on Decolonization as it considers the "Question of East Timor". In view of the time constraints, I shall try to be as succint as possible. I shall spare the distinguished members a review of the historical, political and legal aspects of the East Timor conflict inasmuch as it has been amply covered by previous speakers. On the other hand, they are known to anyone familiar with the work of the Committee since this is not the first time it deals with this issue.

As a representative of the East Timorese people, I cannot but register here my satisfaction in seeing and listening to speakers from all over the world at this year's session on East Timor. From Europe, Asutralia, Japan, the US, Canada, distinguished individuals, have come to testify before the Committee on the situation in East Timor. This is a reflection of the worldwide concern about the tragic conditions in the territory and the continuing military conflict there. More than 10 years after Indonesia's invasion and occupation of East Timor, the world has not forgotten even if certain governments have joined

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with Indonesia in its efforts to throw a curtain of silence around the half-island.

The Committee has before it a working paper prepared by the Secretariat, contained in doc. A/AC/109/871. The authors of the working paper tried to present a "balanced" picture of the situation in the territory, and went about in their efforts by balancing facts and fiction. The fiction is the product of a relentless campaign by the government of Indonesia to persuade the world that it has done wonders for the people of East Timor. The facts of Indonesian continuing military occupation; the continuing brutal war it wages against the people; the denial of the East Timorese people's right to self-determination, are carefully avoided. We are then forced to engage in a debate between what the Indonesian government has done or has not done, in terms of development, education, health; rather than defining a strategy and the means for bringing about the speedy decolonization of East Timor.

We are guided into a debate where we spend time and energy trying to dismistify Indonesian claims instead of

looking into the core of the question, and that is the right of the people of East Timor to self-determination. Indonesian propaganda machine, aided and abeited by its American, Australian, Canadian, Japanese, and European trading partners, and a receptive Western media, tell us that the real question in East Timor is what else the Indonesian authorities should be doing for the improvement of the lot of the people of the territory. Indonesian illegal occupation; its continuing savage war against the resistance fighters; its defiance of the Security Council resolutions 384 and 389(for which all Permanent Members voted in favour); are no longer discussed. But this is not all. The West tell us that it does care about the well-being of the East Timorese and their fundamental rights and proceed to inform us that all is well in this field.

For instance, the working paper prepared by the Secretariat quotes a certain Swedish diplomat, a Mr. Klackenberg. In the Orweallian world of the Swedish diplomat, the resistance has been crushed; for all intents and purposes, the East Timorese people's right to self-determination is no longer an issue; not even the basic individual human rights since according to him he did not see any political

persecution. Did he expect to see torture and political persecution in a three day visit? Apparently, Mr. Klackenberg was hoping to have an opportunity to see exciting scenes of troops shooting at innocent passers-by just accross from his hotel window. Or was he hoping to be seated in an open air theater watching some torture shows? I visited Sweden late in May and had the chance of meeting with Mr. Bo Heineback, head of the Asia Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Present in the meeting was Mr. Klackenberg. Mr. Heineback asked my opinion about the value of diplomatic visits to East Timor. I told Mr. Heineback that Western diplomats visiting East Timor have done so in the past not out of any serious plan to investigate the situation in the territory, but simply to gain a bit more credibility to back up an established policy. Usually these visits last no longer than two to four days (some senior diplomats even stayed only for one day in the capital) and are entirely programmed by the Indonesian security officials. The Indonesians determine who the visiting dignitaries should talk to, what they should see and where they should go, and how long they can stay in the territory. Anyone who claims that he/she was free to talk to anyone, travel anywhere without restrictions,

is not telling the truth. Sure, they talk to the puppet governor, the local bishop, two Goanese priests, and a few more individuals, properly rehearsed by the Indonesians. Do the foreign diplomats know they are being manipulated? Yes, they do. Do they protest or register it in their report? No. Earlier this year, a so-called fact-finding mission of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta, led by none other than Ambassador Bill Morrison, a close friend of the Indonesian military chief, Gen. Benny Murdani, visited East Timor. (To send such a notorious Indonesian apologist to "investigate" conditions in East Timor is like entrusting a fact-finding mission to Namibia to Pik Botha). Even this decidedly pro-Indonesia group did not escape manipulation. Mr. Morrison stayed only one day in Dili. He left behind a team to "investigate" the situation. One particular area the Australians had wanted to visit was Iliomar, a small town in the Eastern region. Their Indonesian hosts had agreed to such a visit. However, one early morning, as the diplomats were awaiting to be flown by helicopter to the said location, their host, a senior intelligence officer, announced that the trip was no longer possible. The reason given was lack of transportation. However, the truth was that Iliomar had become a place the

Indonesians did not wish anybody to see. In preparation for a major offensive against FRETILIN forces in the Eastern sector, more than 3,000 civilians from nearby villages were forced to march to Iliomar. The food situation, already critical before, deteriorated seriously. There was widespread starvation in Iliomar. Not that Iliomar was under siege by FRETILIN. Only that Iliomar had become an ugly place for anyone to see. One tragic consequence of this Indonesian manipulation was that thousands of human beings were being denied help. The Australian diplomats did not register any protest, let alone making this incident public.

The recent visit to East Timor by Mr. Klackenberg is a typical case in that Western governments with close association with Indonesia are not really interested to find out the truth of the situation in East Timor. Their motivation is simply to better defend an established policy. The tragedy is that to defend such morally bankrupt policy, they are forced to cover up the ugly truth. In the process, they contribute to the suffering and death of thousands of people who could have been saved if the true extent of the tragedy were to be fully exposed.

On the debates on the situation in South Africa, Namibia and Palestine, one does not hear arguments to the effect that the ANC, SWAPO or the PLO, do not constitute a real military threat and, therefore, the issue of majority rule and independence are no longer relevant. In the case of East Timor, the debate is not about the fundamental right of the people there to self-determination; rather it is about whether there is any armed resistance at all.

FRETILIN is stronger than ever. Its forces operate in two thirds of the mountain region. Yet, we are told by the Indonesian authorities and their Western friends that the resistance forces are reduced to a "few hundred bandits"; they pose no threat to the Indonesians, and therefore, independence is out of question. Hence, according to Mr. Klackenberg, "as political alternative there is no need for FRETILIN any longer" (sic).

The debate over the extent of FRETILIN's popularity and its military strength has been going on for years. Year after year, we hear the Indonesian side and its friends claiming that there are only "some 100 terrorists" roaming the

countryside, too busy stealing food from the local population, to even think about fighting the Indonesian army. Now, Mr. Klackenberg, the well-informed Swedish diplomat, assures everybody that there is a "maximum of 300 to 800 men with weak popular support" (sic).

The reality of the situation is far from rosy as we are being told. One third of East Timor's original population of roughly 700,000 have perished since the invasion in 1975. People continue to die this very day. Access to the territory by international organizations remains very restricted. It has been claimed that UNICEF has a presence in East Timor. This is a lie. There is no resident UNICEF Representative in East Timor. Its entire program there is in the hands of the Indonesian Red Cross (PMI) whose impartiality is dubious at best. The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has only one nurse in the territory. It is impossible therefore for either organization to monitor the situation in the territory, let alone, control the fair implementation of their relief programs, such as food distribution.

Hundreds of prisoners languish in jail in remote places, well hidden from any inquisitive eye. In these places - Vikeke, Laklubar, Baguia, Kelikai, Lospalos, to mention but a few - hundreds of prisoners are held for months without charge; they are denied adequate food and medical care; they are beaten and tortured at the pleasure of their captros. Only those prisoners in Atauro and Dili are allowed visits by the ICRC nurse.

This is the situation, Mr. Chairman. The Indonesian side will deny everything as it has done in the past. What I propose, Mr. Chairman, is for the UN to send a fact-finding mission to the territory with a specific mandate. We are certainly aware that as long as the Indonesian side refuses to comply fully with Security Council resolutions 384(1975) and 389 (1976), any fact-finding mission to the territory will suffer the same restrictions as previous visits. However, the Special Committee on Decolonization, in fulfilling its program of action as mandated by the General Assembly, should seek a visit to the territory. If such a fact-finding mission were to take place, a number of elements would have to be kept in mind: there should be no

time limit for the duration of the visit (never less than four weeks); there should be a large delegation that could be divided to cover different areas of the country (I would suggest a twelve person delegation, split up in four, each covering a designated area); the delegation should travel by road and not by helicopter as has been the practice of past delegations (one cannot see anything from 10,000 ft. altitude); each group should be escorted by non-Indonesian interpreters who can master both Portuguese and one of the local languages. The delegation's mandate would be one of gathering information on conditions in the territory and to prepare the ground for a genuine act of self-determination to take place under the UN supervision.

This is certainly not an unfair proposition. I'm certain that anybody with common sense would welcome such a proposal as a reasonable way to determine the truth of the situation in the territory and the true wishes of its people. I would dare to say that the Indonesian side - and the likes of Mr. Klackenberg, Morrison, and others - would wholeheartedly support this proposition because it would prove, once and for all, that after all they were right in claiming that

FRETILIN was no longer a relevant political alternative. Of course, the question to be asked to the people should not be limited to either Indonesia, or FRETILIN, but rather between Indonesia, independence or continuing association with Portugal. If the people were to vote for independence, FRETILIN would propose a multi-party, parliamentary system that would allow each interest group in the territory to have a say in a future government.

There's no other alternative except continuation of the war with all its human misery.